



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Assyrian and Babylonian Stone Artifacts as Tangible Fragments of Place

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Abstract

This paper will explore human relationship to stone in two different cultural contexts: Assyria and Babylonia. In Assyria, stone was locally available for monumental constructions such as palace reliefs, stelae, and sculptures, and deeply associated with the (land of the) god Assur. By contrast, in Babylonia, stone outcroppings were rare. The material was typically imported from around the Gulf and manipulated significantly less—carved artifacts such as stelae and door sockets retained the contours of the boulders as found. Smaller objects such as semi-precious agate ‘eyestones’ appear to have been imported into Babylonia from Meluhha, by way of the Gulf, already shaped to some extent to resemble the eyes of various animals (judging from textual and archaeological evidence).

What does it mean to move a fragment of a place—as stone—to another setting and transform it to a greater or lesser degree through carving? Certainly, the material contributes to the meaning and affect of the object carved, but does it also retain and transmit some sense of its place of origin? How does this indexicality operate in Assyria vs. Babylonia? What did stone signify or presence in the two cultural contexts?

Keywords

stone, materiality, place, assyria, babylonia

Session

4. The materiality of inscribed and figurative objects

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